



That said, when we are the junior or less-experienced person in the room, we naturally tend to display a greater number of warm behaviors (also known as attractiveness markers). To increase your presence, adopt one or two behaviors that are more powerful, such as displaying a more serious expression, expanding your personal space, or using fewer verbal qualifiers such as “just” or “I think.” Instead, simply state your opinions without these “protector” words.

In the midst of the busyness of the day, it's all too easy to lose sight of our behavioral goals, so choose a small visual cue as a reminder. For example, a client of mine purchased and wore a ring with a lioness design to remind herself to be more fearless in speaking up. It's also helpful to build a few minutes into your schedule before important meetings to recall and visualize how you want to show up. Because our neurons interpret imagery as equivalent to a real action, visualization helps us act in ways consistent with what we imagined.

Be present. Multitasking, mind wandering, or thinking about work that's piling up as you attend a meeting or interact with others will

detract from your presence. Instead, keep your focus on the moment, demonstrating that you're fully present by asking thoughtful questions or sharing comments that logically follow from the conversation.

By staying mentally present, you will be more attuned to both the content of the discussions you participate in and the people in the room. This enhanced awareness will help you show up in more intellectually and emotionally intelligent ways, and thereby demonstrate higher levels of executive presence.

Executive presence isn't an inherent characteristic reserved for the fortunate few. It's an acquirable skill that you can develop and improve with time. Start now. Decoding and developing this important asset will increase your chances of becoming the leader you want to be.

Originally published on HBR Ascend June 30, 2021

Dina Denham Smith is an executive coach to senior leaders at world-leading brands such as Adobe, Netflix, PwC, Dropbox, Stripe, and numerous high-growth companies. A former business executive herself, she is the founder and CEO of Cognitas, and helps leaders and their teams reach new heights of success.



7. Today's Leaders Need Vulnerability, Not Bravado

→ by AMY C. EDMONDSON and TOMAS CHAMORRO-PREMUZIC

FEW MYTHS ARE as pervasive as the notion that leaders should appear tough and confident. Or at least, that was the case before the pandemic, which exposed the many weaknesses of forceful, dominant leaders and highlighted the superiority of those who had the courage to reveal their vulnerabilities.

Consider how Donald Trump, Boris Johnson, and Jair Bolsonaro dismissed the virus, displayed fearless

bravado, and undermined the calls to wear a mask or socially distance, putting others at risk. Contrast this with the candid and data-driven approach taken by Angela Merkel, Jacinda Ardern, or Sanna Marin, which saved thousands of lives and mitigated the economic damage to Germany, New Zealand, and Finland.

People in organizations of all types are better off when their leaders are smart, hon-



est, and caring when taking bold, potentially unpopular actions—when their focus is on helping the organization move forward, not on how they look and certainly not on creating a false sense of invincibility that actually harms people.

In a complex and uncertain world that demands constant learning and agility, the most apt and adaptable leaders are those who are aware of their limitations, have the necessary humility to grow their own and others' potential, and are courageous and curious enough to create sincere and open connections with others. They build inclusive team climates with psychological safety that foster constructive criticism and dissent.

Above all, they embrace truth: They are more interested in understanding reality than in being right and are not afraid to accept that they were wrong. This allows them to welcome criticism—not because they like it any more than the rest of us, but because they know it's necessary in order to make progress. Altogether, this is a very different type than the macho-style leader who is rarely right yet seldom in doubt.

Some leaders have excelled because of their vulnerable

style. One is Oprah Winfrey, who became the first Black female billionaire in history thanks to a multitalented entrepreneurial career that put vulnerability and authenticity at the center, living her life “inside out.” Another is Satya Nadella, who resurrected Microsoft by transforming its culture based on his own core drivers: humility, curiosity, and constant learning. And a third is Howard Schultz: When he returned to Starbucks in 2007, after the business experienced a substantial decline, he opened up with his employees and was transparent about his challenges and vulnerabilities, which helped drive a return to growth. Although they and others like them have been admired, vulnerable leaders collectively haven't received the widespread public attention and accolades that macho, heroic leaders have garnered.

What can you do to cultivate a more vulnerable style of leadership? Here are some suggestions:

Start by telling the truth.

Share your candid perspective with others, what you know, and what you don't know. Although it is easy to tell people what they want to hear, the best leaders tell people the truth, no

matter how traumatic. When you are clear about the challenges ahead, you help your team. Being open about your weaknesses is the ultimate sign of strength.

Ask for help. Leadership is not heroic. It is not about the actual person in charge; rather, it is unlocking the forces that bring people together as a team. This requires you to be honest about your vulnerabilities and your need for their support. This authenticity will increase their commitment to you and unleash their ideas and energy to tackle the challenges at hand. It will make your team stronger.

Go outside your comfort zone. One of the reasons so many people fail to develop into highly effective leaders is that they stagnate, operating on autopilot, self-perpetuating their habits, and repeating what has worked in the past. This is why playing to your own strengths can be a recipe for disaster: Unless you work on your defects, you won't develop new skills. Yes, this will make you seem vulnerable in the short term, because your performance will always suffer when you are learning a new skill or behavior. But it can only make you stronger in the long term.

When you make a mistake, admit it and apologize.

When you do so, no matter how disappointed people are, they will appreciate your honesty and trust you more than if you lie to them. The short-term sense of invincibility you may experience when you refrain from admitting your mistakes is short-lived and delusional. Failing to admit you were wrong is an ineffective strategy to persuade others that you are right, and when this strategy fails, people will question not only your judgment but also your self-awareness.

Engage others in your journey of self-improvement.

Over our coaching and consulting careers, we have seen a few leaders who were so serious about their personal development plan that they openly shared their feedback (360s, performance reviews, upward feedback, and so forth) with their teams. “Look, I am not very good at giving feedback and developing others' performance,” one of them said to their team. “So from now on I am committing to communicating more, mentoring others, and helping my team members advance their careers, in the hope that this will improve my leadership skills.”

In short, vulnerable leadership in a world of extreme uncertainty and interdependence is vital to making progress when answers are not clear-cut and anyone in the organization may be able to contribute vital knowledge or ideas. As one of us (Amy) noted in her book *The Fearless Organization* (Wiley, 2018), “For knowledge work to flourish, the workplace must be one where people feel able to share their knowledge!”

Originally published on HBR.org
October 19, 2020

HBR Reprint H05WSP

Amy C. Edmondson is the Novartis Professor of Leadership and Management at Harvard Business School. Her latest book is *Right Kind of Wrong: The Science of Failing Well* (Atria Books, 2023). **Tomas Chamorro-Premuzic** is the chief innovation officer at ManpowerGroup, a professor of business psychology at University College London and at Columbia University, a cofounder of *deepersignals.com*, and an associate at Harvard's Entrepreneurial Finance Lab. He is the author of *Why Do So Many Incompetent Men Become Leaders?* (and How to Fix It) (Harvard Business Review Press, 2019), on which his TEDx talk was based. His latest book is *I, Human: AI, Automation, and the Quest to Reclaim What Makes Us Unique* (Harvard Business Review Press, 2023).



8. It Takes Versatility to Lead in a Volatile World

→ by ROBERT B. (ROB) KAISER, RYNE A. SHERMAN, and ROBERT HOGAN

THE LAST THREE years have posed serious challenges for leadership. The inability of many leaders to rise to the occasion revealed that the talent crisis organizations thought they had before the pandemic is worse than they imagined.

Research we conducted in the early stages of the Covid

outbreak showed that leaders with a limited range of capabilities were overwhelmed as they struggled to guide their people and organizations through sudden and unprecedented change. On the other hand, more broadly capable, versatile leaders were effective at helping their people and organizations regroup,

refocus, and continue to produce despite the upheaval.

Data collected since the first year of the pandemic—a time marked by waves of social unrest, economic challenges, and major changes in the workplace and employee attitudes—indicates that versatility is an even stronger component of effective leadership now than in the prepandemic times. The correlations between versatility and a variety of leadership outcomes—employee engagement, team agility, business unit productivity, and overall effectiveness—have gotten stronger.

In fact, in the 26 years that we've been studying versatile leadership with coworker ratings using a 360-degree instrument called the Leadership Versatility Index, its importance has gotten stronger over time. From the late 1990s to mid-2000s, versatility accounted for a little over a third of the variability in leadership effectiveness. By the late 2000s, that figure increased to half. During the first year of the pandemic, it shot up to nearly two-thirds. It has since come down a bit but remains higher than prepandemic figures.

As the world has become more prone to disruption, versatile leadership has become an increasingly

Copyright © Harvard Business Publishing. All Rights Reserved. This content is intended for individual research use only, subject to the following:

Unless permission is expressly granted in a separate license, this content may NOT be used for classroom or teaching use, which includes teaching materials, electronic reserves, course packs or persistent linking from syllabi. Please consult your institution's librarian about the nature of relevant licenses held by your institution and the restrictions that may or may not apply.

Unless permission is expressly granted in a separate license, this content may NOT be used in corporate training and/or as corporate learning materials. For corporate users, please consult the specific terms of your company's license(s) for complete information and restrictions.

For more information and teaching resources from Harvard Business Publishing including Harvard Business School Cases, eLearning products, and business simulations please visit hbsp.harvard.edu.